Osama bin Laden interview by al-Jazeera Arab television channel in 1998

Question: What is your history?

Osama bin Laden: I am Osama bin Mohammed bin Laden. I was born to Muslim parents in the Arabian peninsula in Riyadh, Malez neighbourhood, in 1377 Hijra [the Islamic year: AD 1957] and then by the grace of God we went to Medina six months after my birth, where I spent most of my life between Mecca, Jeddah and Medina.

My father, Sheikh Mohammed bin Awad bin Laden, was born in Hadramout [Yemen], from where he came to Hijaz to work for more than 70 years. God honoured him by granting him the tenders to build the mosques of the holy sites where the Kaaba is, and at the same time he also built the prophet's holy site.

When my father found out that the Jordanian government had submitted a tender to renovate the Dome [in Jerusalem], he gathered all the engineers and asked them to submit a tender for a cost price only, excluding profits. They told him they could guarantee him winning the bid even if they added on a percentage for profit, but he insisted that it be exclusive of any profit.

When they submitted their total figure to him, they were surprised that he (God rest his soul) had then gone ahead and reduced the total figure they had submitted for the project even further in an attempt to guarantee their company winning the renovation bid for the building of the holy site and the renovation of this particular one [the Dome of al-Aqsa mosque].

He won the bids and began the work. And on some days he was able to perform three of his daily prayers in three of the holiest sites.

I studied economics at Jeddah University and I began working in my father's company and on roads from an early age, even though my father passed away when I was 10. This is the brief history of Osama bin Laden.

Q: What do you seek?

OBL: What I seek is what is right for any living being. We demand that our land be liberated from enemies. That our lands be liberated from the Americans. These living beings have been given an inner sense that rejects any intrusions [of their lands] by outsiders.

Let us take an example of poultry. Let us look at a chicken, for example. If an armed person was to enter a chicken's home with the aim of inflicting harm to it, the chicken would automatically fight back.

Q: Do you think that the British-American attacks against Iraq will increase the popularity of uprising people against America, or will such attacks subdue them into desisting from any actions militarily or otherwise against the US and its interests?

OBL: Our enemies roam and meander in our seas and lands and skies, attack and assault without seeking permission from anyone, in particular on this occasion when America and Britain were unable to muster alliance in this blatant, disgraceful plot.

The present [Arab] regimes no longer have the power. Either they are collaborators or have lost the power to do anything against this contemptible occupation. So Muslims should emigrate somewhere where they can raise the symbol of Jihad and protect their religion and world, otherwise they will lose everything.

Are they incapable of appreciating the calamity that befell our brothers in Palestine and forgetting how the Palestinian people, once famous for their activity and agriculture and citrus and also for making of soap, have become a refugee people, turned into slaves of those colonialist Jews who dictate their movements? The situation is dangerous and if we do not move now when the ancient holy site of 1,200 million Muslims has been usurped, then when should people stir?

Those who believe that such attacks [against Iraq] will terrorise the Islamic movements are deluding themselves. We Muslims believe that our time of death is fixed. Our fortunes are in the hand of God. Since God created these spirits, granted people fortunes and exchanged them for heaven, why would they [Muslims] refrain from serving their religion?

Q: Following last year's attacks against Afghanistan, reports quoted you saying that you will retaliate. So far we have not seen any retaliation. Should there be further attacks against Afghanistan, will there be physical retaliation against the attackers and in what form will it come?

OBL: Our duty is to incite the jihad against America, Israel and their allies. We are following this route. Because of circumstances surrounding us, as well as our inability to move outside Afghanistan to take care of matters closely, we were unable to do so.

But, with the grace of God, we have established with a large number of our brothers in the International Islamic Front to confront Jews and the crusaders. We believe that the affairs of many of those are moving in the right direction and have the ability to move widely. We pray to God to grant them victory and revenge on the Jews and Americans.

Q: The US has warned its citizens and interests in the Gulf of the possibilities of attacks by your followers. How serious are these threats and do you target American citizens in general or mainly the American forces in the Gulf and other Islamic areas?

OBL: I heard this news [of the US warning] a few days ago, which filled my heart with joy. But how serious the threat is I cannot say. If I knew the person who made the threat I could respond, but unfortunately I have no idea who undertook this blessed effort and we pray to God to help them, let them be successful and grant them the body bags of the infidel Americans and others.

A target, if made available to Muslims by the grace of God, is every American man. He is an enemy of ours whether he fights us directly or merely pays his taxes.

You might have heard those who supported Clinton's attacks against Iraq formed three-quarters of the American population. A people that regards its president in high favour when he kills innocent people is a decadent people with no understanding of morality.

Q: The Pentagon has circulated news that you are suffering from muscular disease as a result of which you have a life expectancy of five to six years. How true is this report?

OBL: We are continuously thankful to God for I enjoy very excellent health. We here in the mountains endure severe cold weather, as well as extreme hot summers.

My favourite hobby is horse riding and I can still ride a horse non-stop for 70 kilometres [40 miles]. These are intentional rumours, perhaps aimed at disheartening some of our Muslim supporters and maybe even to calm the fear of Americans by suggesting that Osama is incapable of doing anything.

The truth is that this issue is not purely tied to Osama, for this is a nation of 1,200 million Muslims who will never allow the house of God to remain with these tainted arrogant Jews and Christians. We are confident in the knowledge that they will continue the jihad and unleash painful strikes against America and its allies.

Q: Last August 20 when the US air strikes were carried out against Afghanistan it was reported that you were attending a meeting which came under attack and that the air strike was timed to get you.

Were you attending this meeting, and is it true that you received a message from Pakistan asking you to leave that area immediately because of a possible strike? What is your relationship with Pakistan and do you think it will ever support the United States in its quest against you?

OBL: The intelligence that the Americans had was false. I was a few hundred kilometres away. As for the reports that we were pre-warned, I can say that thanks to God we have found a supportive people in Pakistan and one which has surpassed our expectations in the way it has supported us.

Q: Some newspapers say that you seek to acquire nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. How true are these reports?

OBL: We are seeking to drive them [the US] out of our Islamic nations and prevent them from dominating us. We believe that this right to defend oneself is the right of all human beings. At a time when Israel stocks hundreds of nuclear warheads and when the Western crusaders control a large percentage of this weapon, we do not consider this an accusation but a right and we reject anyone who accuses us of this.

We congratulated the Pakistani people when they achieved this nuclear weapon and we consider it the right of all Muslims to do so.

Q: Considering the charges by the American administration, which relate to terrorism, will you be willing to confront such allegations in another country and in a neutral court of justice?

OBL: There are two sides to this conflict. The international crusaders and the Jewish Zionist alliance headed by America, Britain and Israel. The second party is the Islamic world.

It is unacceptable in such a conflict whereby he aggresses and enters my innermost consecrated land and robs the Muslims' oil and then when faced with any resistance by the Muslims accuses them of being terrorists. This is either stupidity or assuming the others are stupid.

It is our legal duty to resist this occupation and to punish them with the same means they use against us.

Q: The Taliban said it would try you, should those governments accusing you present categorical evidence of your links to these charges. Do you expect a trial in accordance with laws used by Taliban and the Islamic Sharia?

OBL: We accept any court of justice that applies Islamic Sharia without being influenced by the infidels. We are willing and prepared, at any time, for any [Islamic] legal court of justice whereby the prosecutor and the accused can stand together. But if the prosecutor is the United States, then we too can become prosecutors and charge her with many things that it has committed in the land of Muslims.

But when the Americans, may Allah fight them, accused me they refused to agree to abide by our Sharia and said they were demanding one thing only and that is to hand over Osama bin Laden. They deal as if people are their slaves and sheep and with utmost arrogance. We pray to Allah to degrade them.

Q: You were accused of the attacks against the US embassies in Nairobi and Tanzania. What is your true stance with regards to these attacks?

OBL: Those who follow the international news would have worked out how much support there is in the Islamic world for attacks against Americans, even though people were saddened by the deaths of some innocent civilians of those countries. But it was clear that there was huge rejoicing and satisfaction in the Islamic world.

So I regard with honour those men who carried out bombing attacks in Riyadh, Khobar or East Africa. The same applies to the Palestinians, who are teaching the Jews great lessons.

Q: But the US says it has proof of your involvement in these attacks? In the investigation it is said that a person from your group has made confessions relating to your organisation and its links to bombings, including the World Trade Centre [in 1993]?

OBL: America's allegations are many, but they do not concern us much. Those people are resisting the international infidels who occupied their lands and what angers America most is when people it has abused resist its abuse.

Despite this I maintain that its allegations are false, unless it means that I am involved in inciting and goading them, which is very clear and to which I confess at all times. I was one of those who signed an edict calling for jihad and we have incited for several years now and, thank God, many brothers adhered to our calls.

Yes, they confessed during some interrogations that they were influenced by some of our statements that we made to people and in which we announced certain edicts about the obligation of Muslims to wage jihad against those occupying Americans.

What is wrong with resisting the aggressor. The North Koreans, the Vietnamese, they all resisted the Americans. This is a given right.

As I said in the past, we missed a great honour in that we were not involved in the killings of Americans in Riyadh. So these charges are false. If the charges against me are for incitement then they are true. It is I with other Muslim brothers who incite jihad.

Q: Mohammed Sadeq Howeida [one of those arrested in connection with the East African embassy bombings] claimed that he was trained in your camps and was personally acquainted to you. How true are his confessions?

OBL: In the training camps in Afghanistan more than 15,000 men were trained. As far as reports say I ordered him to carry out these attacks, I believe this is an erroneous American attempt against me. It has no evidence. Assuming that brother Howeida did say such things, it would have been under torture during which he was forced to make false confessions.

Q: After the air strikes against Afghanistan the US president called for an economic war against you. Will this cause you major discomfort?

OBL: War is war. You win some days, you lose others. America has created enormous pressures against our activities from an early date and this did affect us. Certain countries in which we have money and properties ordered us to cease aggression against America, but it is our obligation to goad the Umat [Muslim peoples] and thanks to God we continue.

Q: Last February you called a jihad against the crusaders and the Jews and, in particular, against the Americans. This call came at a time many of the movements who had walked the path of armed struggle started to cease such activities and to start participating in their countries' parliaments. Don't you think that by calling a jihad you are going against the trend?

OBL: Those Muslims who say that these are not times for jihad are gravely wrong.

Following the absence of jihad from our Umat for such a long time we acquired a generation of people seeking education who had not experienced the reality of jihad, and they have been influenced by the American culture and media invasion that stormed the Muslim countries. Without even participating in a military war we find this generation has already been psychologically beaten.

What is true is that God granted the chance of jihad in Afghanistan, Chechnya and Bosnia and we are assured that we can wage a jihad against the enemies of Islam, in particular against the greater external enemy - the crusader-Jewish alliance.

Those who carried out the jihad in Afghanistan did more than was expected of them because with very meagre capacities they destroyed the largest military force [the Soviet army] and in doing so removed from our minds this notion of stronger nations.

We believe that America is weaker than Russia and from what we have heard from our brothers who waged jihad in Somalia, they found to their greatest surprise the weakness, frailness and cowardliness of the American soldier. When only eight of them were killed they packed up in the darkness of night and escaped without looking back.

Q: A reward of $5 million has been placed for your arrest or information leading to your arrest by the Americans. Are you afraid of being sold by a treacherous party?

OBL: These men left the world and came to these mountains and land, leaving their families, fathers and mothers. They left their universities and came here under shelling, American missiles, and attacks.

Some were killed: six Arabs and one Turk. These men left the world and came for the jihad. America, however, which worships money, believes that people here are of this calibre.

I swear that we have not had the need to change a single man from his position even after these reports were made. We do not suspect our brothers and accept them for their goodness.

Q: What kind of relationship is there between you and the Taliban. Are you part of it or do you function independently but from Afghan territory?

OBL: I call on all Muslims outside Afghanistan to support this nation. With their thoughts, their donations and their support, for it represents the symbol of Islam.

Any aggression by America today against Afghanistan should not be seen as mere aggression against Afghanistan itself, but should be seen as an aggression against Afghanistan the carrier of the real and truest Islam in the Muslim world, the one waging Jihad in the name of the Islamic world.

Our relationship with the Taliban is very strong and it is an ideological relationship not based on mere political or financial relationships. Many nations have tried to pressure the Taliban and force them into things, but by the grace of God they have been unyielding in their beliefs.

Q: How true are reports that the Taliban will hand you over should there be damning evidence against you?

OBL: From what I have heard the Taliban denied such reports and said it was untrue, but only God knows the truth.

Q: The CIA says there was a relationship with you during the Afghan-Soviet war.

OBL: In answer to your previous question as to whether we are working here independently of the Afghans, the truth is that we do not operate here in an independent fashion. We are in a state that has a prince of believers and we are obliged under the Sharia to obey him.

We are committed to this nation and call upon the people's support and warn against America's propaganda, whereby it seeks to strike the Afghan state, but it seeks to do so under the pretext of hitting Osama bin Laden. This will not serve her at all.

As far as we are concerned, we are not intimidated by American missiles. But we warn them any strike against this people is an aggression against the Muslim nation.

Because of many circumstances in Afghanistan, the Taliban has a view that we should not conduct any moves from inside Afghanistan against any other state. This was a decision from the head of believers. But we do incite others and the issue does not end because of our restricted movement during these times.

Q: Going back to the previous question of you and the CIA and American support for the war against the Soviets . . .

OBL: This is misinformation by the Americans. Every Muslim the minute he can start differentiating, carries hate towards Americans, Jews and Christians, this is part of our ideology.

Ever since I can recall I felt at war with the Americans and had feelings of animosity and hate towards them. So what they say happened between them and myself is out of the question.

It is only because the Americans were occupying the region that they threatened to use military force should the Soviets conduct such an intervention. So the Americans would be lying if they claim they had supported us. We challenge them to provide evidence supporting such claims.

They were a burden on us and on the mujahideen in Afghanistan, for we were performing our obligations in protecting Islam in Afghanistan even though this obligation of ours was at times serving, though without our consent, interests of America.

When the interests of two sides coincide at times, this does not amount to co-operation. We regard them with animosity and there are statements going far back with us calling for a boycott of American products, and even the necessity to attack American forces and America's economy. This goes back for over 12 years now.

Q: Reports suggest that your followers and supporters are also active in some Arab states such as Yemen. How true are these reports?

OBL: Well . . . [he smiles] our connections are rife in the entire Muslim world, be it in Pakistan, Yemen or anywhere else. With Yemen we have strong relations which go back a long way, in particular since our origins and those of my father date back to Yemen.

Q: What are your end objectives and what message would you like to make to the Islamic world in general?

OBL: We believe very strongly and I say this despite the pressures imposed on us by the regimes and media. They want to skin us from our manhood. We believe that we are men, Muslim men, committed to defend the grandest house in the universe. The Holy Kaaba is an honour to die and defend. So this is our aim - to liberate the lands of Islam from the sinners.

America and some of its agents in the region bargained with me more than 10 times to keep quiet and silent this small tongue of mine. "Shut up" and we will return to you your money. They believe that people only live for worldly matters and they forgot that our lives are meaningless if we do not seek to please the good will and pleasure of Allah.

Finally, I advise all Muslims to adhere to the Koran. This is the way out from our present predicament. Our cure is the Koran. When one reads the Koran one wonders: Do they not read the Koran or do they actually read but not understand as they should?